



# With Friends Like These...

## The role of critical friends in professional development



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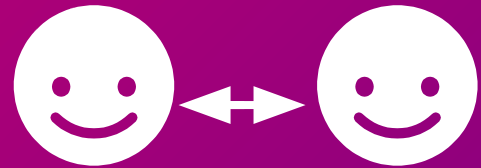
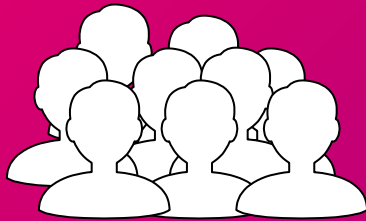
“A critical friend is typically a colleague or other educational professional, such as a school coach, who is committed to helping an educator or school improve. A critical friend is someone who is encouraging and supportive, but who also provides honest and often candid feedback that may be uncomfortable or difficult to hear. In short, a critical friend is someone who agrees to speak truthfully, but constructively, about weaknesses, problems, and emotionally charged issues” (Great Schools Partnership).

# What do critical friendships look like?

- Supportive but not enabling
- Mutually beneficial
- Founded on trust
- “Tough Love”

# What forms might critical friendships take?

- Professional learning communities for teachers
- Writing groups
- One-on-one critical friendships



# CFGs as PLCs, OMG!

Auslander et al. (2018) identify critical friends groups (CFGs) as “one type of PLC [professional learning community]” that is “characterized by intentional use of structured conversations via protocols to guide the group’s learning as well as group leadership by a facilitator trained according to the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) guidelines” (p. 23).

# The value of CFGs for teachers (Bambino, 2002)

- “The Critical Friends Group process acknowledges the complexity of teaching and provides structures for teachers to improve their teaching by giving and receiving feedback” (p. 25).
- Key functions of critical friends: **giving feedback, collaborating, finding new solutions,** and **creating community** (pp. 26-27).

# CFGs in this context...

Have tended to focus on K-12 educators and are usually described as including “8-12 educators who meet regularly” (Auslander et al., 2018, p. 23), though Fahey & Ippolito (2015) wrote about new models of CFGs, including a whole school CFG, a virtual CFG, a higher education CFG, and CFGs that cut across school districts or include both K-12 and higher ed educators.

“

“The simple conclusion after reviewing these iterations is: Educators really want to talk. But the more complicated conclusion is that they want something more than a check-in while using the copying machine or heating up their lunch at the microwave”  
(Fahey & Ippolito, 2015, p. 51).



But CFGs aren't just  
for teachers...

# Writing Groups as CFGs

Agraphia group (Silvia, 2007)

A voluntary support group for people who want to write

# Five Components to an Agraphia Group

1. Set CONCRETE short-term goals
2. Stick to writing goals
3. Use carrots AND sticks
4. No students allowed
5. COFFEE

# Think/Pair/Share

Take a minute to think about the following questions:

1. Do you currently participate in any professional learning communities or writing groups?
2. If yes, how have you benefited from your participation? If no, do you see opportunities to do so?

When the timer goes off, share with someone sitting near you.

# One-on-One Critical Friends

“...a trusted person, who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person’s work as a friend.”

(Costa & Kallick, 1993)

# Think/Pair/Share

Take a minute to think about the following questions:

1. Do you have a colleague you would consider to be a “one-on-one” critical friend?
2. How did that relationship develop?

When the timer goes off, share with someone sitting near you.

# Critical friends in librarianship

Dimmit, Maxwell, & Nesvig (2019) write:

“While much of the literature on critical friendships comes to us from the education discipline, there is crossover between the language and framework used to describe this process, and the language and processes more commonly used by academic librarians to mentor and advise one another” (p. 217).

# How can a critical friend help?

- Bouncing off ideas
- Diplomacy filter
- Accountability partner
- Constructive criticism
- Peer teaching observations\*

\*See Dimmit, Maxwell, & Nesvig (2019) for more on this function of critical friends



# A critical friend must...

- “Be clear about the nature of the relationship, and not use it for evaluation or judgment;
- Listen well... taking time to fully understand what is being presented;
- Offer value judgments only upon request from the learner;
- Respond to the learner’s work with integrity; and
- Be an advocate for the success of the work”  
(Costa & Kallick, 1993).



# Putting it together: Writing a critical friendposal

## **An example friendposal:**

I'm looking to improve my project management skills so that I can be more effective in moving one of my current projects forward. I've always considered this to be a strength of yours, and I'm hoping you might have some free time in the next few weeks to talk with me about the process I'm currently using. I would really appreciate your candid feedback and and would welcome any strategies or solutions you might be able to address.

# Thanks!

## QUESTIONS?

Feel free to contact us:

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# Resources & References (1)

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